ware river nature club

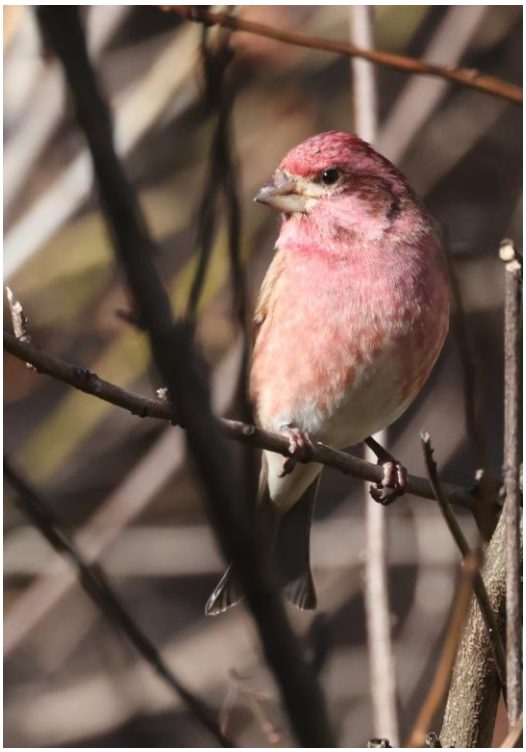
November 2026

* * * NATURE NEWS * * *

FINCH RESEARCH NETWORK

WINTER FINCH FORECAST

This year's winter finch forecast by Tyler Hoar begins with a brief recap of the 2025-2026 winter. He writes: "Last year was a bit of a mixed bag for boreal irruptions, but it was a solid flight year here in the east for Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks and Purple Finches with a small flight of Pine Siskins too. The picture looks mixed again this year, as crops are good in the east and the far western parts of the boreal, but are largely poor in the central areas of the boreal." Keeping in mind that the main focus of the forecast is Canada, the northeast U.S. and Massachusetts did indeed experience a modest uptick in Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches. Pine Grosbeak sightings, however, were concentrated further north. Type 12 Red Crossbills continue here following a major irruption into Massachusetts 2021-2022.



Pine Grosbeaks and Redpolls do not figure in the local forecast this winter. After last year's modest Great Lakes and northeastern United States irruption, not much of a Pine Grosbeak flight is expected.

There appears to be a pretty robust American mountain-ash fruit crop across much of the boreal regions that will hold birds to the north.

In the case of Redpolls, birch seed crops on yellow, paper, gray and bog (swamp) birch all appear mixed and variable, but crops in parts of Quebec and the Maritimes seem quite good. This will likely be a sufficient cushion to hold most Redpolls to the north in Canada. Maybe the western Great Lakes and perhaps northeastern border areas will get a small-to-modest irruption, but to be honest, this species has become increasingly harder to predict in the last 15-20 years. Note: In 2024, Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpoll and the Lesser Redpoll in Europe were lumped into the same species, now called Redpoll. Genetic work found that a supergene was responsible for the Redpoll plumage differences.

The following species can be expected in Massachusetts this winter:

Red Crossbills ~ White-winged Crossbills

This year there is a good-to-great eastern white pine crop, and a pretty good spruce crop in interior sections of southeastern Canada, the Great Lakes, and northeastern United States. Type 12 Red Crossbills will likely dominate in their usual conifer haunts across the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, but there has also been a significant irruption of Type 2 Red Crossbills that has moved west to east across the country – this is again due to the poor pine crops in the interior west. As the winter progresses, expect more Type 2s to make their way into the northeastern United States. Will more Type 4 or Type 3 come as well? Time will tell!

The Red Crossbill types are usually impossible to identify without recordings of their flight calls. Recordings can be made with a smartphone and identified to type. Matt Young (info@finchnetwork.org)will identify types if you email him your recordings or upload them to an eBird checklist. Matt and fellow FiRN board member Tim Spahr (Massachusetts) have now listened to upwards 30,000 recordings. Recordings uploaded to eBird checklists are deposited in the Macaulay Library. For more on the Red Crossbill call types: https://finchnetwork.org/crossbills-of-north-america-species-and-red-crossbill-call-types

A small-to-moderate push of White-winged Crossbills can be expected in the east as most crossbills remaining in the east should gravitate towards the interior areas of Ontario, Quebec, and the northeastern United States. Suitable food sources are any cone-laden spruces, including ornamentals.

Pine Siskins

Southeastern Canada, the Great Lakes region, and the northeastern United States have a very good northern white cedar crop; some areas have a good eastern hemlock crop as well. Siskins love cedar and hemlock seeds. The eastern white pine crop is also very good. Spruce is good, too, but more variable comparatively speaking. The last time the eastern areas experienced a great white pine crop in 2023-24 Pine Siskins were plentiful from January into spring. Again, this will be a year where several finches like Pine Siskins, the two crossbill species, and even Purple Finches will be found in the forests more than at feeders. So, to find them more reliably, rather than waiting for them to possibly show up at birdfeeders, one will have to venture out into the conifer forest areas to find them.

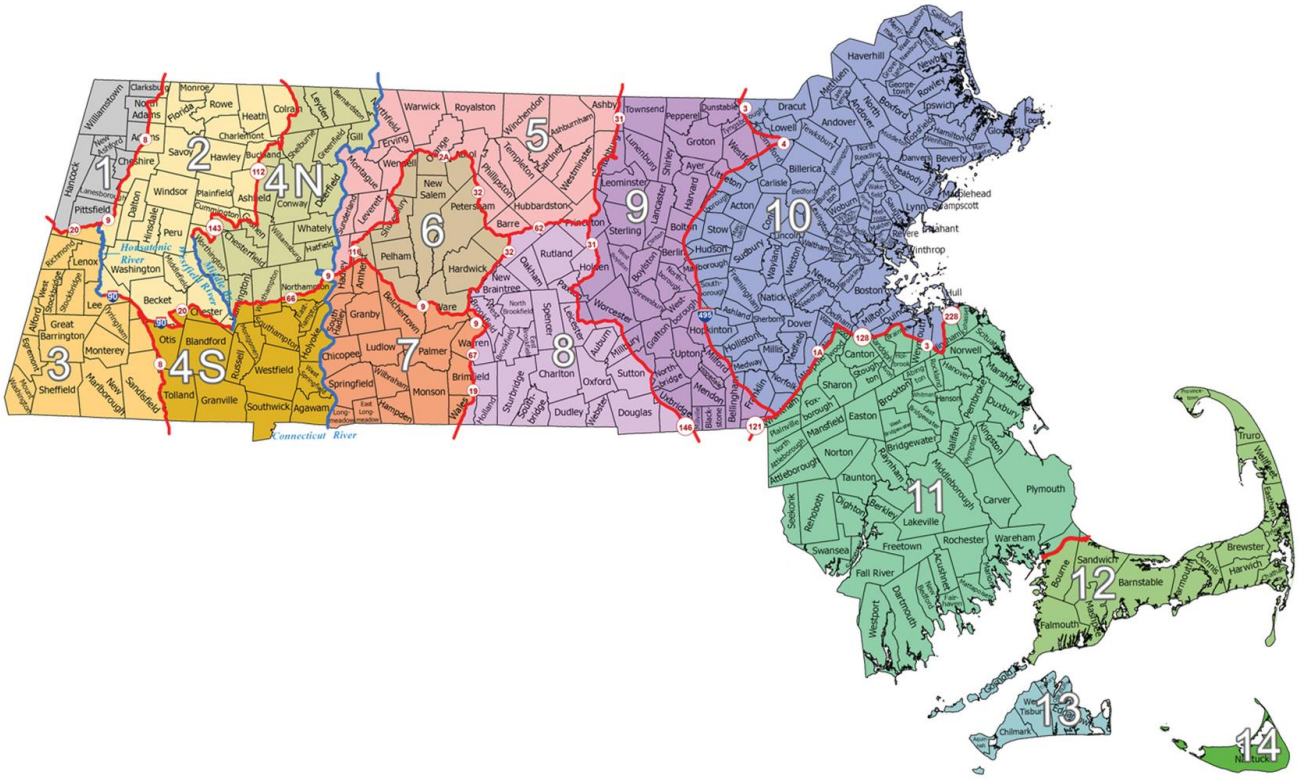
Evening Grosbeaks

The budworm outbreak in the eastern boreal region has persisted in many areas for a decade or more, and for this budworm-loving finch, that has meant a local increase. Parents have been quite successful raising families on this abundant food source. A small movement is quite possible again south of the boreal to southern New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts as well.

HUNTING IN MASSACHUSETTS

Wildlife Management Zone map

MassWildlife manages wildlife using Wildlife Management Zones (WMZ). Zones are delineated based on their capacity to support deer and other wildlife.



Migratory game birds:
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/migratory-game-bird-hunting-regulations

Deer hunting seasons

Season	Zone	Date
Winter Deer Season	Zone 13 & 14 only	Jan. 1 – Feb. 14, 2026
Early Deer Season	Zone 13 & 14 only	Sept. 21 – Oct. 1, 2026
Archery Deer Season	Zone 1-14	Oct. 5 – Nov. 28, 2026
Paraplegic Hunt	get hunt details	Oct. 29–31, 2026
Shotgun Deer Season	Zone 1-14	Nov. 30 – Dec. 12, 2026
Primitive Firearms Deer Season	Zone 1-14	Dec. 14–31

* link in chart is not live

Other hunting seasons

Species	Zone	Dates
Black bear	Zones 1-14	Sept. 7 – Dec. 12, 2026
Wild turkey	Zones 1-13	April 27 – May 23, 2026 Oct. 5 – Nov. 28, 2026
Pheasant*	Zones 1-14	Oct. 17 – Dec. 31, 2026
Quail*	Zones 1-14	Oct. 17 – Dec. 31, 2026
Ruffed grouse	Zones 1-14	Oct. 17 – Nov. 28, 2026
Crow*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026 – Apr. 10, 2026 (Mon, Fri, Sat only) July 1, 2026 – Apr. 10, 2027 (Mon, Fri, Sat only)
Bobcat*	Zones 1-8	Jan. 1 – Mar. 7, 2026 Dec. 21, 2026 –Mar. 8, 2027
Coyote	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026 – Mar. 7, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026 – Mar. 8, 2027
Cottontail rabbit*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026 – Feb. 28, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026 – Feb. 27, 2027
Fox (red or gray)*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026 – Feb. 28, 2026 Nov. 2, 2026 – Feb. 27, 2027
Gray squirrel*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026 – Feb. 28, 2026 Sept. 8, 2026 – Feb. 27, 2027
Opossum*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1–31, 2026 Oct. 1, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027
Raccoon*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1–31, 2026 Oct. 1, 2026 – Jan. 30, 2027
Snowshoe hare*	Zones 1-14	Jan. 1, 2026–Feb. 28, 2026 Oct. 17, 2026–Feb. 27, 2027

*Closed during shotgun deer season.

* links in chart are not live

Year-round hunting: The following species may be taken year-round (except during shotgun deer season) by licensed hunters and falconers with no daily or seasonal bag or possession limit: English sparrow, flying squirrel, red squirrel, chipmunk, porcupine, skunk, starling, weasel, woodchuck. Falconers may hunt pheasant, bobwhite quail, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hare, and gray squirrel from the respective opening day through March 14, and crow during the regular crow season.

Ring-necked Pheasant

Every year, MassWildlife stocks an average of 40,000 pheasants on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and other lands open to the public. These birds are stocked for recreational hunting.
2026 hunting season dates:
Oct. 17 – Dec. 31, 2026
All dates inclusive. Hunting is prohibited on Sundays.
Pheasant hunting is closed during the shotgun deer season.
For a map and information on stocking frequency, go to:
https://www.mass.gov/info-details/find-a-pheasant-stocked-area
For example, the map showing Winimusset WMA in New Braintree indicates that pheasants are released there three times a week from the Saturday after Columbus Day to the week of Thanksgiving.

Be safe, be seen this fall

Heading outdoors this fall? Blaze orange helps hunters, hikers, dog walkers, and other outdoor users stay visible during hunting season. Discover how Massachusetts research helped make blaze orange a nationwide safety tool and get simple safety tips .

MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you identify? Answer at the end of the newsletter.

SAW-WHET OWL BANDING DEMONSTRATION

with State Ornithologist Drew Vitz Princeton, October 30, 2026

Five owls – two males, two females, one unknown – were captured, measured, weighed and banded. One owl had been banded as a hatch-year bird at Berkshire Bird Observatory in fall, 2025.

Photos by Anne Green and Scott Wahlstrom

BRILLIANT COLORS IN FALL OAK TREES

Some of the oak trees in our area seemed to show some eye-popping color this fall, not immediately turning dull brown as in some years. More color can be attributed to certain weather conditions; shifts in weather are why oak tree identification by leaf color can vary so much from one season to the next.

Low nighttime temperatures that stay above freezing signal the tree to seal off its leaves, intensifying the chemical reactions that create brilliant hues. Severe drought can stress the tree, causing it to skip the vibrant phases and transition directly to brown. Since there was more consistent moisture here late summer through early fall, it may have affected the health of the foliage, enabling it to undergo a complete hue-changing transformation.

Oaks are typically among the last trees to change color, often peaking after maples and birches have already finished their display, and seemingly lackluster in comparison. But this year's peak for oak foliage - late October to November – offered a late-season burst of gold, bronze, and red. As the green pigment of chlorophyll disappears, other hidden pigments become visible. These include carotenoids, responsible for yellows and oranges, and anthocyanins, for reds. The final hue is determined by the balance of pigments within the leaf. Northern red oak and scarlet oak colors typically feature intense crimsons and fiery oranges, fueled by the late-season production of anthocyanins. White oak has been described as having violet-hued foliage that eventually settles into a steady, chocolate brown. It's the high concentration of tannins that eventually renders oak leaves brown. These bitter, acidic compounds are highly stable and remain visible long after more delicate reds and oranges have faded away.

When oak leaves stay on the tree all winter it's due to a biological trait called marcescence. It's most frequently observed in younger trees or on the lower, more sheltered branches of mature oaks. Instead of forming a complete abscission layer to drop the leaves in autumn, the tree retains its dried foliage until the expanding buds of spring finally push them off.

* * * ANNOUNCEMENTS * * *

HELP WANTED: FACEBOOK MARKETPLACE

Throughout the 13+ years of our existence, Ware River Nature Club has acquired a number of attractive and interesting donations to the annual fundraiser auction. Inevitably, some items fail to attract bidders, but they're still in our possession and have some value. We are seeking a volunteer who has a Facebook or eBay account and would be willing to help sell these items via Facebook Marketplace or eBay. We would supply the photos, description, and selling price, and help arrange shipping, pickup, dropoff, etc. Our volunteer seller would be responsible for responding to inquiries and communicating with WRNC. As thanks we can offer one year of free membership in the Club. Contact warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com if you'd like to help.

RUTLAND LIBRARY NATIVE PLANT GARDEN: FALL FINALE

The final phase of the native plant and pollinator garden project at Rutland Public Library has been completed. Shrubs and perennials installed at the front of the building include Northern bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), beautyberry (*Callicarpa dichotoma 'Early Amethyst'*), anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), *Liatris spicata*, Bowman's root (*Gillenia trifoliata*), wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginica*), and mountain mint, both narrowleaf (*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*) and *P. virginianum*. We look forward to seeing the new garden in the spring.

Due to the density and volume of Oriental bittersweet roots beneath the shrubs remaining on both sides of the front garden, library staff and the Town's DPW are considering removal of the remaining aged shrubs and "starting from scratch," since a large disturbance would make it easier to remove as much of the invasive bittersweet as possible. Timing for this would be the 2027 growing season. We'll keep potential garden volunteers informed of progress in this direction and hope to be involved with continuing the trend to incorporate native plants in the library's foundation beds.

THANK YOU to our volunteers: Scott Wahlstrom, Alan Rawle, Christy Barnes, Bethany Nichols, Lisa Van Dusen, George Farrington, and Natalie Bodt.

* * * UPCOMING EVENTS * * *

CENTRAL MASS WILDLIFE TRACKING CLUB

ANIMAL TRACKS & SIGN IN THE QUABBIN REGION

Gate 43, Hardwick
Sunday November 8th
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Leader: Bryan DiFabio bryan@dfabio.com

Tracking enthusiasts of all experience levels welcome! Contact Bryan for more information/sign-up.

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

HIKING THE HOLDEN RAIL TRAIL

Wednesday November 11th 10 a. m.

This short, smooth, and slow walk will start at River Road and travel alongside the Quinapoxet River. It's an easy 2-mile segment of the Holden-West Boylston section of the Mass Central Rail Trail.

Barry DeBaun

HIKE THE MIDSTATE TRAIL REDEMPTION ROCK TO WESTMINSTER

Saturday November 14th 9 a.m.

Photo by Betty Jenewin

A continuation of the group's Midstate Trail journey, this 5.5-mile segment takes us from Redemption Rock and over the Crow Hill Ledges. It continues to Route 2 and crosses to Route 2A. It is rated difficult due to the elevation gain.

For more information or to register:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com

FORBUSH BIRD CLUB

BIRDING WORCESTER'S PONDS

Saturday November 14th 8 a.m. – mid-day

Leader: John Shea john@beachwells.com

Mallard

Discover some of the beautiful natural ponds within the city where migrating ducks and other waterfowl congregate. Meet inside the entrance to All Faith's Cemetery, Island Road. We will drive to other nearby locations.

Hooded Merganser (non-breeding plumage)

Photos by Betty Jenewin

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

BIRDING & NATURE HIKE
HARVARD POND, PETERSHAM
Sunday November 15th 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

A pleasant and easy 3-mile hike around the pond at this time of year usually provides a chance to see various waterfowl species as well as resident forest birds and some late migrants.
We're always on the lookout for other interesting nature sightings, too.
Dress for the weather. Bring beverages and/or snacks if you wish.
We will postpone or cancel in the event of inclement weather, so please let us know if you plan to join us: warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com .

Photos by Alan Rawle

ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

ANNUAL DINNER MEETING & GUEST PRESENTATION

I SEE YOU:
STORIES FROM WETLANDS AND WOODS

with wildlife photographer Dale Monette

Wednesday November 18th 5:30 p.m.

American Legion Hall 325 Pequoig Avenue Athol

If you've missed seeing Dale Monette's most recent collection of Quabbin region wildlife photographs, this is a great opportunity to view it. Dale's entertaining stories accompany his outstanding photographs.

In addition to the presentation, the evening will include the traditional Tin Can Auction (guests may bring up to 5 new or lightly-used items for the auction), a 50/50 raffle, and other activities.

Folks who do not wish to join us for dinner may arrive shortly before 7:00 p.m. for the presentation, auction, and raffles. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., dinner at 6:00 p.m. and program at 7:00 p.m. There will be two dinner options available: braised beef ($30.00) or vegetarian lasagna ($25.00).
Meals include salad and dessert.

REGISTER HERE

STERLING GARDEN CLUB

SUCCESSFUL NATIVE SEED SOWING AND GROWING

with Elizabeth Anema Woodland Hollow Garden

Thursday November 19th 10:30 a.m. - noon

American Legion Hall 32 School Street Sterling

Learn how easy and cost-effective it is to grow native plants from seed to support a wide range of pollinators in your landscape. Find out about helpful equipment and other tips and tricks to maximize success from a gardener who for several years has raised hundreds of native seedlings. This is a useful workshop for novice and seasoned gardeners who want to incorporate native plants into their landscape for pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED
The program is free but you must pre-register by November 17th by email: SterlingGardenClub1934@gmail.com with your name, club affiliation, and email address.

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

IN THE TRACKS OF BLACK BEAR

with Jim Morelly

Saturday November 21st 10:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland

Our season of nature education programs would not be complete without a wildlife presentation by Jim "Hikingcamera" Morelly. Jim has a great interest in black bears and has focused special attention on the bears that roam the Quabbin region. Join us as he explains how strategic trail-camera placement reveals the secretive lives and behavior of black bears. He will highlight and provide details about bear sign in Massachusetts woodlands and share insights from his recent MassWildlife article, *In the Tracks of Black Bears*, featured in Issue No. 3 of 2026. Jim will also present an anecdotal study of bear activity from March through July that addresses their population status in the Quabbin region.

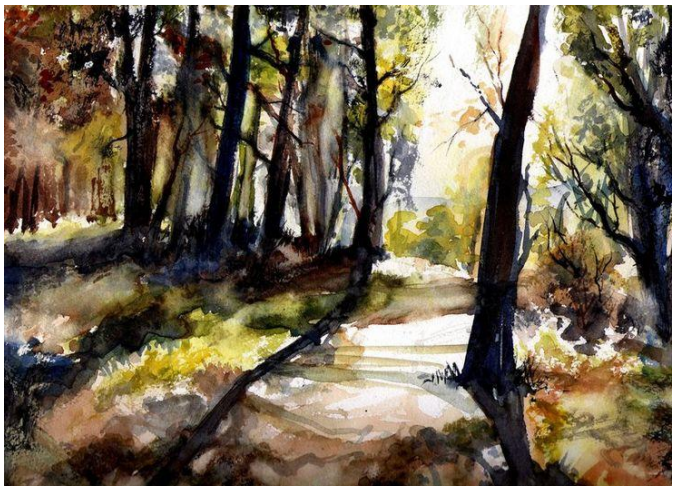
We look forward to seeing you!

Jim Morelly trailcam

Randy Robbins

Jim Morelly trailcam

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!



Just-A-Witness

HIKE PARADISE POND LEOMINSTER STATE FOREST

Wednesday November 25th

10 a.m.

This moderate senior hike covers about three miles. Beginning at the Rocky Pond Road trailhead, the trail continues down to the south end of Paradise Pond, returning along the west side of the pond.

WACHUSETT MOUNTAIN NORTH HIKE

Saturday November 28th 9 a.m.

This challenging hike is rated “difficult,” covering five miles with a 1,000-foot gain in elevation. The uphill climb will be along the Bolton Pond Trail to Balance Rock, then onward to the summit via the Semuhenna and Old Indian trails.

For more information or to register:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com

FORBUSH BIRD CLUB

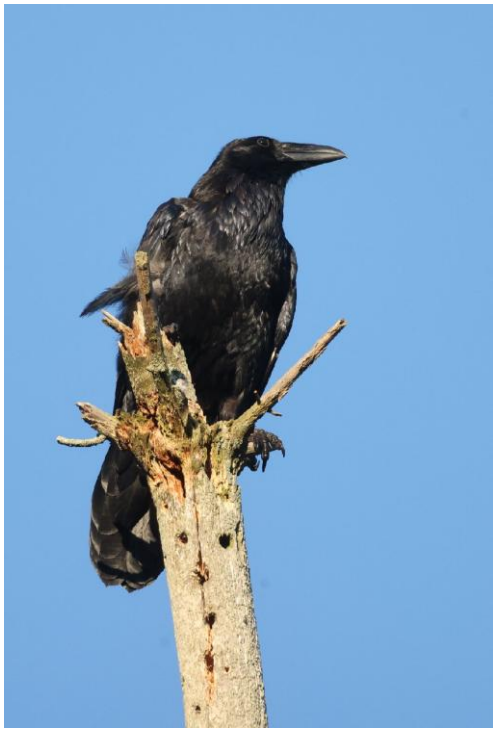
BIRDING
QUABBIN PARK, WARE

Sunday November 29th

8 a.m. – mid-day

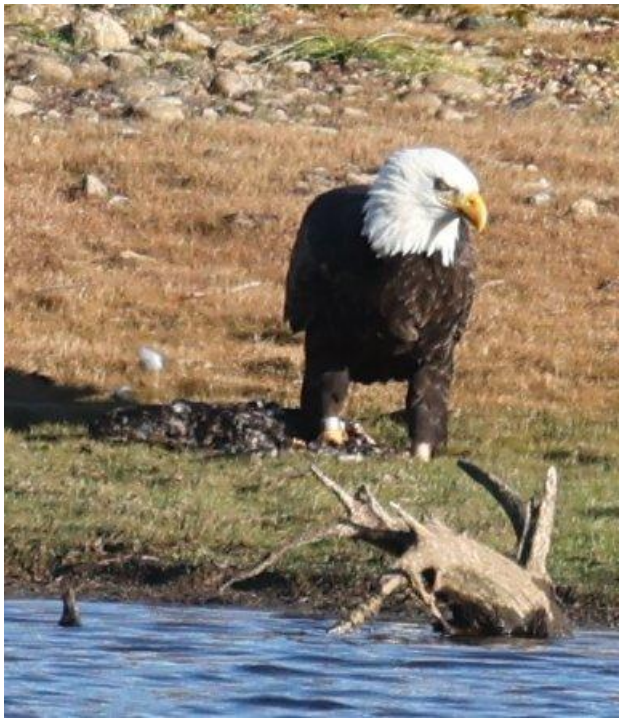
Leader: Nick Paulson

grendelpgill@yahoo.com or text/leave message at 508 330-4401



Quabbin is a great place for spotting late-fall species, including eagles and waterfowl.

Meet at the parking lot for the Old Ware-Enfield Road gate off Route 9 in Ware. Directions: From Route 9 in Ware, drive west approximately 5 miles and turn right onto Old Ware-Enfield Road, just before the entrance to Quabbin Park Cemetery on the left. Meet at the parking lot on the right, before the gate.



CENTRAL MASS WILDLIFE TRACKING CLUB

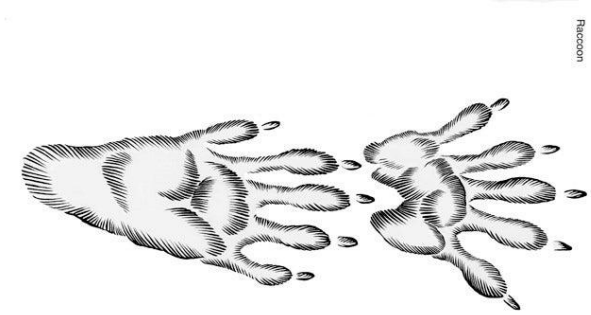
ANIMAL TRACKS & SIGN IN THE QUABBIN REGION

Sunday November 29th

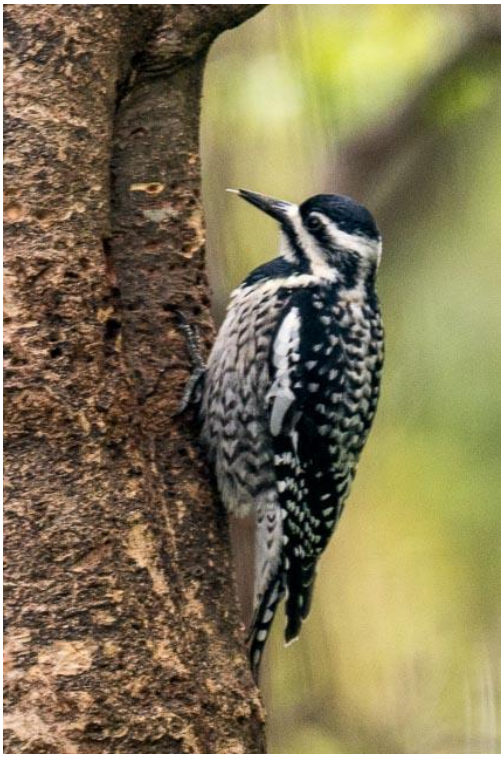
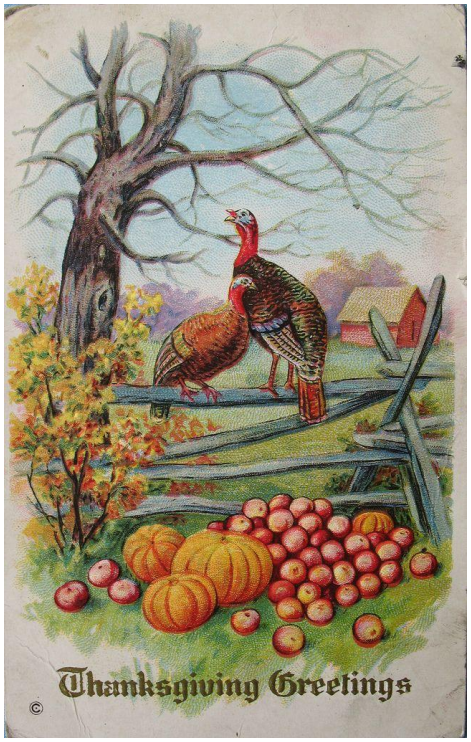
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Leader: Bryan DiFabio
bryan@dfabio.com

Exact location TBA. Tracking enthusiasts of all experience levels welcome! Contact Bryan for more information/sign-up.



Cedar Waxwing eating serviceberry
Photo by Betty Jenewin



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, female with black cap (instead of red), which occurs occasionally
Photo by Bill Platenik